

FISH and WILDLIFE COMMISSION AGENDA ITEM COVER SHEET

Meeting Date: November 14, 2013

Agenda Item: Flatt Property Conservation Easement

Division: Wildlife

Action Needed: Preliminary Approval

Time Needed on Agenda for this Presentation: 10 min

Background

This proposed conservation easement involves 1,760 contiguous acres located 14 miles south of Dodson. The property is interspersed with numerous ephemeral and seasonal glacial wetlands (8%) surrounded by a mix of native mixed grass prairie (49%) and seeded native grasslands (43%). This complex of wetlands and grasslands are ideal for productive breeding habitat for waterfowl, especially northern pintail. The property also includes an adjacent 320-acre BLM grazing lease. In addition to waterfowl, the land receives regular use by pronghorn and a mix of declining grassland birds, including seasonal use by sage-grouse.

Through their Revolving Land Acquisition Program (RLAP), Ducks Unlimited, Inc. purchased this property because of its high waterfowl values and the risk of conversion to cropland. RLAP entails DU purchasing private properties in fee, establishing a conservation easement on the property, then reselling the property to the private sector as protected working ranchland. The Flatt project is adjacent to a Waterfowl Production Area administered by the U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service. This conservation easement would expand the footprint of conserved wetland and grassland habitats and would also expand opportunities for public hunting and recreation access.

Public Involvement Process & Results

FWP has not sought any public comment at this time. Upon endorsement from the Commission, FWP would proceed with negotiations and conduct appropriate analysis and public review processes.

Alternatives and Analysis

The conservation easement option allows the ranch to remain in private management and ownership while conserving (and in some cases increasing) the productivity and ecological and recreational values of the property. In the absence of this project, it's likely the former cropland areas would go back into grain production and remaining prairie habitats would also be susceptible to cropland conversion, directly affecting key habitat values.

Agency Recommendation & Rationale

FWP recommends proceeding with this conservation project because of the potential threats, strategic location, and high habitat values for breeding waterfowl and other native wildlife in the area.

Proposed Motion

I move the Commission give preliminary approval for this conservation easement project, allowing FWP to initiate negotiations and to conduct analysis and associated public review.